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METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.

I.

Main Hall.

THERE are few pretensions to Art, as far as the outside goes, in the construction of the building which contains the collection of the Metropolitan Museum. Square in form, it is not, however, wanting in symmetry. What it has is a certain aspect of massiveness, due to the brick and the heavy stone cappings, which convey somewhat the impression of a safe-deposit building. It remains always a question whether buildings devoted to Art-purposes should be florid at the expense of security. It is, then, perhaps wiser to have a solid, unadorned casket, in which the jewels should be preserved. From the outside it is at once apparent that the architect had in view the necessity of perfectly lighting the building, and the roof shows its covering of glass. Constructions for Art-galleries are a special study, which our architects are fast solving. The problems are many and even complex. Security being the first thing to be sought for, the fitness of the building for display must in some measure be subservient to the careful policing of the building. Precious objects must not be scattered in far-off places. Guardians of a museum must have the opportunity of looking around them,

so that at a glance all their cases may fall under their inspection.

If the outside of the Museum presents no attractive features, when the building is entered the impression received is of the most pleasant character. The floors are of tesselated stone, the four staircases are wide, the ascent is not too rapid, and the ventilation and light are admirable. The decoration is grave and sober, but not in the least depressing. Certain tones have been adopted of a maroon colour, with a light contrasting blue, and occasional whites, which are pleasantly harmonious. Such ornamentation of an architectural character, imposed on pillars or cornices, has no obtrusiveness about it. The frame, in fact, for the picture has been decorously imagined, and is in the highest degree creditable to the taste and judgment of the architect. The roof in the main hall rises in a graceful curve, held up by sweeping girders, the iron-work painted of an approved colour. In ascending the stairs, some two stories, to reach the picture-galleries above the main hall, a most charming effect is produced by circular openings, which, without glass in them, allow the opportunity of seeing perfectly into the various rooms. The more one looks at the interior of the building, the greater is the satisfaction derived from it. It is evidently an honest, good building, with no meretricious gewgaws about it, and answering perfectly all the purposes required. In the basement there are convenient quarters for the various officers of the building, with good and light rooms for the packing and repacking of the artistic objects. Here, too, is a fine large hall, with plenty of sunshine in it, to be devoted to supplementary exhibitions, or for an Art-school.

In the west entrance-hall on the main floor, which fronts the park, are the modern statues. In the central hall are the loan collections, in numerous cases, which perhaps break up some little the general effect. Here are the laces and embroideries. At the east

Group I.

end are the Greek and Etruscan vases, with the Kensington Museum reproductions at the west end. Right and left are numerous show-cases, containing the innumerable loans made to the Museum, such as Japanese and Chinese ivories, Egyptian antiquities, rare tomes, old books in their superb bindings, Limoges enamels, antique arms, with Dresden, Sèvres, and majolica; Oriental and Japanese stuffs, silver *repoussée*, Venetian glass, miniatures, and an endless variety of artistic objects. In the north and south aisles of the east hall are the Cyprian antiquities, the vases, terra-cottas, bronzes, busts, and statues, of the Cesnola collection. In this hall these Cypriote objects occupy quite three sides of the room, besides being placed in many additional cases. The most careful attention has been paid to their classification, which must be of the greatest advantage to those desirous of studying them. The two sarcophagi, which are the capital pieces of the Cesnola collection, are at the back of the hall. In such a large hall this collection, especially as to the statues and busts, is wonderfully improved, and the advantage of a better locality is at once appreciable. Strung along in the former museum in Fourteenth Street, if they looked like milestones, in the new building, with the good judgment displayed in their arrangement, they present a most impressive appearance. On the left-hand side, facing the entrance, has been carefully placed the immense Cesnola collection of pottery. Mounting to the next floor is an easy task, as the steps are not too rapid. Looking through the gigantic *œils-de-bœuf* before mentioned, which gives breathing-time, the visitor then arrives at the upper halls. Here are the pictures in two halls, the east and west ones. Proceeding along the gallery taken up by the Avery collection of porcelain, the east picture-gallery is reached. Continuing the circuit, the south gallery may now be traversed, which leads to the west hall. This south gallery contains the most precious of General di Cesnola's discoveries, the Curium treasures, with the iridescent glass. Here, too, are all the bronzes, Venetian glass, a collection of watches, and *bibelots* innumerable. As to

the pictures in the galleries, the east ones contain the examples of the Flemish and Dutch schools, the property of the Museum. In the west hall are the pictures loaned to the Museum.

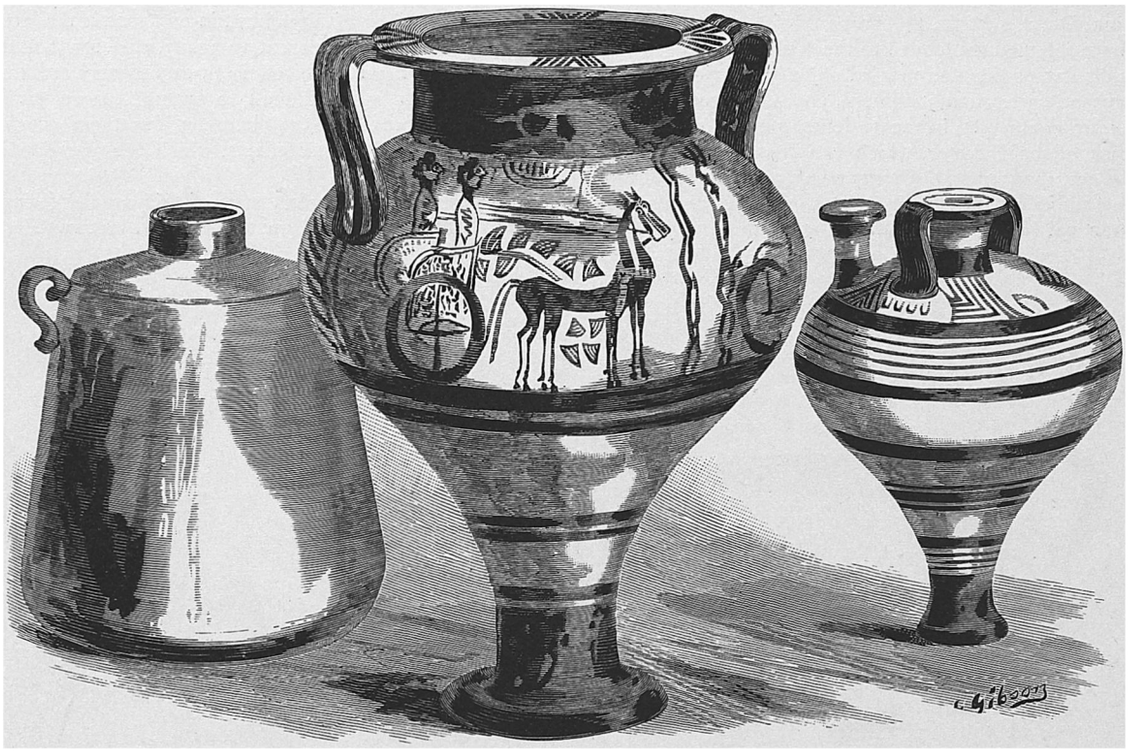
In all this display of the many varied objects, so briefly alluded to for the present, care, good judgment, and taste, seem to have controlled the arrangement. In the technical portion of the Museum, that task of the Director, which consists in the choice of form for the cases, their internal arrangement, and the decoration of them, General di Cesnola has been most notable for his good sense and practical ideas. The numbering of every object has been carefully carried out. Cases all bear their special number, so that the finding of any object in any case is rendered perfectly easy. Although not apparent to many, the simple numeration of so infinite a number of objects is an exceedingly arduous task. A museum is even more difficult to arrange than a library, because subjects vary, not only as to character, but there is a question of size, sometimes of artistic effects, which the librarian need never charge his brain about.

The engraving on the first page of this article, giving a view of the main hall, is taken from the left side, towards Eighty-second

Group II.

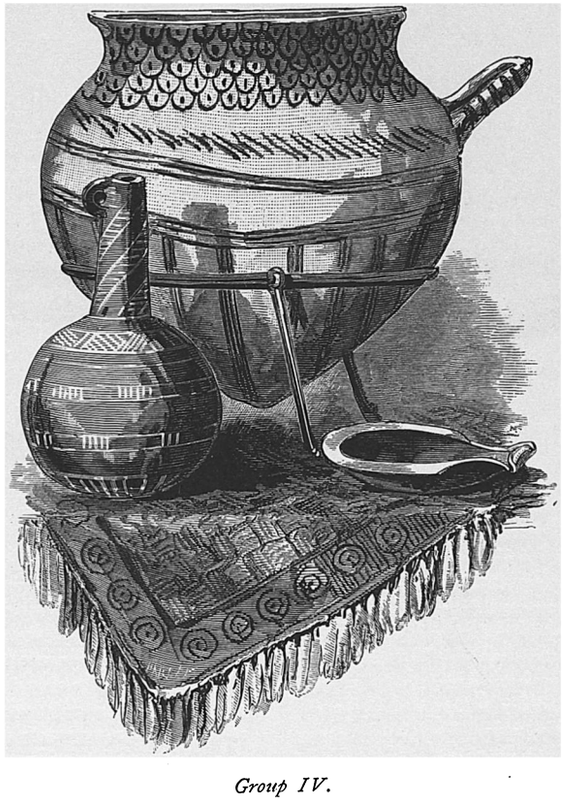
Street and Fifth Avenue, but is by no means at the end of the room. It has been purposely chosen, as presenting a glimpse, as it were, of the general fine effect of the hall. The statue on the extreme left is No. 37 of the collection, representing a female figure of rather an archaic type. The statue to her right, seen somewhat in profile, is a copy after a Greek statue, and is among the best of the figures in the Cesnola collection. On the left-hand side, following along, are placed the Cyprian vases, urns. On the right, the busts, statues of the same collection; and back, other objects derived from Cyprus, as the bas-reliefs, the inscriptions, with the sarcophagi. In the gallery to the right, just under where the arches abut, is the Avery collection. In front, the entrance being indicated by a door, is the loan collection of pictures; and back, at the extremity of the hall, up-stairs, are the Dutch and Flemish pictures belonging to the Museum. It may be seen at once, as the light comes in floods from the ceiling, how perfectly clear and distinct every object becomes. To modify or temper the light on the left-hand side of the building, when necessary, screens are drawn inside, over the glass roof. Save at the back and front, all side-lights are evaded.

The Cypriote collection, found by General di Cesnola in Cyprus, which occupies the major portion of the main hall, will form



Group III.

in this first article the subject of our illustrations. The objects collected by General di Cesnola are innumerable, and, putting aside for the present the Curium treasures, may be divided into the pottery, and the busts and statues. The terra-cotta work may be considered for the present as supplementary to the pottery. This pottery illustrates the earliest known specimens of a somewhat intelligent handicraft. Art, as we understand it, our conceptions being taken from a Greek standpoint, but rarely finds an illustration in this pottery collection. Speculative imagination may lapse into the wildest exaggerations over any early form, because it approaches to a sphere or approximates to a curve, without its filling a more sober or cool-headed mind with even a trace of such an illusion. It is a mistake, which would be a fatal error in the Art-education of a people, if any one were to insist that one in a hundred of these Cyprian objects made by the potter was beautiful. How could it be expected that the early inhabitant of this Island of Cyprus should be imbued with the Art-sentiment? Some 2,300 years ago, when the first lump of plastic material was moulded into form, it must have been at best a haphazard process. Utility of form, convenience, was thought of as to shape—subordinate, of course, to the character of the material and the imperfect processes of manufacture. Many of these pieces exhibited date, then, from a period some 1,500 years before Christ. If the Island of Cyprus felt any of those higher Art-influences which Egypt undoubtedly possessed, the Cypriote workman was either hard to teach, or preferred a method entirely his own, suited to the wants of the people he lived among. Even if Cyprus owed its civilisation to Phœnicia, some very faint traces of it may be seen, rather as single emblematic figures, recalling some primitive idea of worship, than in contour of decoration. Lying as the island did not far from the mainlands of Europe, Asia, and Africa, at least in her early age she might have received the artistic imprint of all the three civilizations. We do see vases that have on them crude copies of Egyptian forms, even of Assyrian designs; but, this once accomplished, their efforts went no further. Mr. A. S. Murray, who has written an appendix to General di Cesnola's book, says, "They (the Cyprians) may have lapsed back to a mere system of patterns." There is this remark to be made in regard to this collection of Cypriote antiquities, that it is immensely advantageous in an ethnological rather than in an artistic sense, since the numerous objects found therein give us the opportunity to study the gropings of a certain human family confined to a restricted surface of land. How slow is human development becomes quite manifest when one remembers that between some of the forms, as shown in Group I., and the age of Phidias there was an interval of 1,200 years and more. Why, then, considering this immense distance of time, should there be any disappointment at the absence of the Art-element? All we want to show is its non-existence, in the first place, in the early work, and even that when these Cyprians had arrived at their apogee (when it was, can with difficulty be de-



Group IV.

termined), surrounded though they might have been with the most superb phase of Art, when it might have been perfectly possible to imagine that they would have been inspired by the contact, they showed but little of a true Art-feeling. If an Art-light was thrown on them they did not absorb it, but deflected it in an abnormal way.

Group I. shows some of the earliest forms of pottery. They are crude masses of clay badly fired, perhaps representative of some tutelary deity. The whole lower line of figures in the illustration are of this type. They are hardly even archaic. The fourth figure has the semblance of a head, with four ear-rings. A discussion as to her being a Venus would be out of place here. The fifth and sixth figures undoubtedly are those curious symbols of a double sex, a bearded woman. The large head, with its peculiar cap, has bars of colour on it, and is almost life-size. It undoubtedly belongs to a period many years after the time when the cruder small figures were made. The semblance of a horse with a figure on it is certainly of a most ancient period. This, No. 279 in case 17, has many repetitions in the collection. It is not, as might be supposed, a child's toy. Such figures, when found in a tomb, have never been discovered in conjunction with the remains of children. It was, undoubtedly, the intention of those who buried a man to give him, with this little clay horse, the semblance of something which, when he awakened, he might use to ride about on in some other state. The small chair with a figure seated in it is painted in yellow and brown, and is perhaps contemporaneous with the coarse figures below, with the exception of the head, and of the two bearded figures; they represent the very infancy of Art, and are only curious.

In Group II. a great stride is visible. The left-hand vessel, in red clay, with handle, has a double mouth-piece. The material is fairly smooth. The ornamentation, four small rosettes, is well applied. An idea of form has necessitated greater skill in the making of the piece. The long, slender vase, recalling precisely that shape which Æsop introduces into his fable of the stork and the wolf, is fairly graceful, and shows remains of polish. The large vessel behind it is not wanting in a certain grace of form. It is of red clay, and its ornamentation must have been made by rolling a strip of the red earth, then giving it the pressure of the thumb and finger all along its length, and next applying it to the surface. Next to it, a kind of sack-like form, is No. 155 of the collection. This conventional form is constantly met with among primitive people. It imitated the leather sacks made of the skin of an animal, in which wine or fluids were carried. The two knobs on it were conventional, singularly enough types of ornamental persistence. In the animal, when it was flayed, the dugs might have existed, and these were retained in the coarse pottery. The large vase, on which the one just described leans, resembles in form the one on the left, save that it has a different neck. The two circular forms on the side are not open but closed. It has been suggested that, with their cup-like form, as they might hold fluid, they would represent to a possible purchaser a sample of the contents. The small flat piece on the right at the bottom is the very earliest form of lamp. It is simply a small saucer with one side pinched in, in which the wick could be placed. The two forms above in the illustration are of light clay with black and brown lines, and show an advancing method of manufacture.

In Group III. the central vase is curious. It is about twenty inches high, of a whitish-yellow inclined to an umber, with a poor glaze. On it is painted a chariot with a pair of horses. It is in the very infancy of Art, recalling the poorest attempts of our own Indian work. It requires some particular attention to discover whether there are two horses or only one. The colours used are mostly black for the decoration. To the left is a well-shaped vessel of a whitish-yellow, of about a capacity of four gallons. It has no Art-pretensions. The right-hand vase is better. It shows human skill. Its form, with so small a base, precludes the idea that it was in common use. This vase shows a smooth polish, and the decoration, in black, inclining to a red, is evenly applied. The central portion, on which the handles rest, has no opening; it is the one on the side through which the fluid was poured. Many years, perhaps centuries, must have elapsed between the time when this object was fashioned and the last of the illustrations, which represents a pot of a most primitive form and material. The material is of a whitish clay, which seems rather to have been sun-dried than baked, though it has undergone some slight firing. It is exceedingly thin, and apparently would scarcely resist the least shock. The colour has been applied here and there by hand, but not, as many of the others, when on the potter's wheel. This decoration is black. On the rim are certain little transverse lines, and portions of the uneven circles which sweep around it are made up of hatchings. The small bottle on the side is of a black ware with a polish, and the ornamentation is scratched. On the neck is a slight protrusion, pierced with a hole, by which it was slung. This shows better material, higher polish, greater neatness, and consequently a notable advance. To the right is a small lamp, but slightly differing from the simplest form in Group II., by having a lip turned in to prevent the lamp from spilling, and as a prop for the wick.

These figures, very faithfully drawn, represent certain types in the collection which are brought in this first article into evidence as illustrative of a very early period in the ceramic Art of the world.

(*To be continued.*)

OUR STEEL ENGRAVINGS.

ST. JOHN AND THE VIRGIN MOTHER.

E. ARMITAGE, R.A., Painter. W. RIDGWAY, Engraver.

A PUPIL of Paul Delaroche about the same time that John Cross was studying under Picot, Mr. Armitage, the painter of 'St. John taking home the Virgin after the Crucifixion,' has inherited much of his master's loftiness of thought and earnestness of manner. In religious Art, indeed, he is the most successful of all English painters, and in the mural decoration of churches his pencil has been more in request than that of any other.

Just before the dying Saviour exclaimed on the cross, "It is finished," He "saw his mother and the disciple standing by whom He loved;" and "He said unto his mother, Woman, behold thy Son! and to the disciple, Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." We see the "beloved" disciple in the act of fulfilling his Master's request. The Roman soldiery and the Jewish rabble beyond John's little garden wall are returning to the city, for "all things have been accomplished," and he, with the loving tenderness of a son, is in the act of introducing his divinely given mother to his own home.

The composition of the two chief figures is at once learned and natural, and the lines in the drapery fall with consummate freedom and grace. The robe of St. John is red, and that of the Virgin blue, and the rest of the picture takes its complexion accordingly. It was exhibited at the London Royal Academy in 1874, with the artist's portrait of Sir Benjamin Brodie, Bart., and the second section of his 'Dream of Fair Women,' representing those of ancient Greece.

NAUGHTY PUSSY.

E. FARASYN, Painter. A. DANSE, Engraver.

IN his own country Monsieur Farasyn is already gaining reputation and popularity, founded in some measure upon the merits of this work, but with us he has hitherto been but little known. M. Farasyn is a native of Antwerp, that Art-renowned city, which is,